

Scrutiny Streets, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday, 19 February 2019 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair), Jan Buttinger (Vice-Chair),
Richard Chatterjee, Luke Clancy, Felicity Flynn, Joy Prince and Callton Young
Also Present: Councillor Helen Pollard (part)
Apologies: Councillor Robert Canning

PART A

10/18 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

11/18 Disclosure of Interests

There was none.

12/18 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no urgent items of business.

13/18 Grounds Maintenance Contract

The Sub-Committee received a report set out in the supplemental agenda which provided an update on the decision to bring the Grounds Maintenance service back in-house from 1 February 2019.

The report was introduced by the Head of Environment who advised the Sub-Committee that following the decision to bring the Grounds Maintenance back in-house, the Council was taking steps to ensure that all the staff who transferred over from the previous contractor Idverde, were being paid the London Living Wage. A benefit of managing the service in-house, was that it would allow greater flexibility to meet the standards expected by the public.

Following the introduction, the Sub-Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions about the service. The first question concerned the decision to bring the service back in-house and whether there had been any particular concerns about the performance of the previous contractor. In response it was advised that the nature of the previous contract, with a cap on the total budget available to deliver the service, together with a detailed specification of the work required had meant that in practice it was very difficult for the contractor to deliver without operating at a loss.

As the service being provided by the contractor had not met the expected standard, it was questioned what steps had been taken to address the issues. It was advised that financial penalties were levied against the contractor for not achieving the standard set out in the contract. It was highlighted by a Member that in applying financial penalties, it would have made the service even less financially viable for the contractor, which was acknowledged.

The Sub-Committee was advised that many of the complaints from the public about the service related primarily to grass cutting and the emptying of bins in parks. It was suggested by Members that the decision of the contractor to delete the Park Ranger role and incorporate it into a broader park maintenance role may have helped to contribute towards the issues.

Despite the difficulties experienced with the contract it was emphasised that the contract had come to its natural end, rather than being terminated early. In light of the contract coming to an end an assessment was undertaken on the different options for the service going forward. This included in-house delivery, partial in-house with certain services out sourced and going back to market for a contractor to deliver the service in full. From the analysis it was clear that the cost would be approximately the same to deliver the service in-house as going back to the market. As such the decision was taken to bring the service back in-house as it offered the Council a greater degree of flexibility on service delivery. A request was made for information on the business case for bringing the service back in-house to be shared with the Sub-Committee.

As it was noted that the initial preparation work for changing the delivery of the Grounds Maintenance service had started in early 2018, it was suggested that it would have been beneficial if the Sub-Committee had been consulted at an earlier stage in the process, before the final decision had been made. It was agreed that a recommendation would be made to the Cabinet highlighting the need to consult with Scrutiny prior to making decisions on large contracts.

Focussing on the delivery of the service moving forward, it was advised that the first step would be a review of the service to understand the vision for park maintenance and what the public expected from the parks. The equipment and vehicles used to deliver the service would also be reviewed as and when the current equipment required replacing.

The Sub-Committee was pleased to note that the Council would be actively engaging with the various friends groups of local parks to allow the opportunity to input into the service review. It was questioned how the Council would consult with the public in those areas without friends groups. It was agreed to recommend that further thought be given to how to consult with the wider public on the service review.

Operating the service in-house would allow greater flexibility to manage how it was delivered going forward, particularly around the deployment of staff to manage resources at peak times. Grass cutting had been a particular issue for the previous contractor, however through delivering the service in-house it would allow staff to adjust their work to take into account seasonal growth.

It was noted that some of the parks in the borough suffered from anti-social behaviour and as such it was questioned what plans were in place to tackle this going forward. It was advised that going forward there would be an onus on staff to be the eyes and ears of the service, with a reporting process being put in place which would be easily trackable. Staff would also have training in how to deal with anti-social behaviour when it was encountered in parks.

It was noted that there was often inconsistency in the timings of when parks were locked in the evening, which may be helping to contribute towards a rise in anti-social behaviour. In response it was advised that the locking of parks would be reviewed to ensure that it was focussed on those parks where it was most needed.

It was questioned whether there would be opportunities to increase the income raised from using parks for events such as festivals and whether any funds raised would be invested back into the service. It was confirmed that options to increase the number of events held in local parks were being explored and any income raised would go back into the park service budget.

The Sub-Committee welcomed the range of opportunities made possible from bringing the service back in-house and questioned whether there were plans to improve the biodiversity of the parks in the borough. It was advised that there were a number of different boroughs who had good biodiversity programmes that the Council could learn from. However it was likely that there would be some parks that were more suited to environmental initiatives than others.

The Chair thanked the officers for this attendance at the meeting and for answering the Sub-Committee questions and invited them and the Cabinet Member for Clean, Green Croydon to attend a meeting of the Sub-Committee in the autumn to provide and update on the service review.

Information Requests

The Sub-Committee requested that further information be provided on the business case for bringing the Grounds Maintenance Service back in-house.

Conclusions

Following the discussion of this item, the Sub-Committee reached the following conclusions:

1. Although the Sub-Committee was supportive of the Grounds Maintenance service coming back in-house, it was agreed that it would have been beneficial if more information had been included in the report on the business case for doing so.
2. It would have been preferable for the Cabinet Member for Clean, Green Croydon to consult with the Sub-Committee prior to the decision being made to bring the Grounds Maintenance service back in-house.

3. The Sub-Committee welcomed the move to ensure that all staff were paid the London Living Wage.
4. During the discussion, there were various ideas raised for future service delivery, but the Sub-Committee agreed that for the immediate future the business plan for the service should have a primary focus on providing the core services at an acceptable level.
5. The Sub-Committee recognised that there was a wide variety of parks and open spaces in the borough and as such felt that a bespoke approach, tailored to the specific circumstances in each area was needed rather than an overarching, one size fits all approach.
6. The move toward increased engagement with the various Friends Groups of the parks in the Borough was welcomed, but it was questioned how the Council would engage with users of parks without Friends Groups.
7. The Sub-Committee welcomed the development of a Service Improvement Plan for the Grounds Maintenance contract.

Recommendations

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Clean, Green Croydon:-

1. That the immediate focus for the Grounds Maintenance Service should be on providing its core services at an acceptable level for the residents of Croydon.
2. That the business plan should be developed on a park specific level.
3. That consideration should be given to how to consult with the public in those areas without friends groups.
4. That the Cabinet Member for Clean, Green Croydon be invited to attend the meeting of the Sub-Committee on 1 October 2019 to provide an update on the Service Review and future plans.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to all Cabinet Members:-

1. That Scrutiny should be consulted before decisions were made that would change the method of service delivery, such as bring a service back in-house.

14/18 Trams Update

The Sub-Committee received a report set out on pages 17 to 46 of the agenda, which provided an update on the improvements made to passenger safety following the tram derailment in November 2016.

In attendance at the meeting for this item was:-

- Jackie Townsend – Managing Director, Tram Operations Limited
- Mark Davis – General Manager, Transport for London – London Trams

The Sub-Committee received a presentation from Jackie Townsend on the performance of the tram network in Croydon and the steps that had been taken to improve safety following the derailment. During the presentation the following was noted:-

- i. The investigation into the tram derailment was still ongoing.
- ii. The tram system was accessible for all without assistance. With space available for mobile scooters and buggies. Going forward further consideration would need to be given to the provision of bicycle storage.
- iii. The service regularly achieved near 99% performance on a daily basis, with only a noticeable drop during the Ampere Way fire which had effected the service for over a week.
- iv. The majority of issues with the trams in Croydon arose from road traffic accidents. When incidents occurred, Trams Operations Limited worked with both the Metropolitan and Transport Police to clear the route as quickly as possible.
- v. Following the tram derailment, an emphasis had been placed on improving the competency and expertise of drivers with more assessors and trainers employed along with enhanced safety guidance being provided to staff.
- vi. Changes had been made to the staff rosters to ensure they were more fatigue friendly. From April a system of five day rosters would be introduced, down from seven day roster system used at present.
- vii. The Guardian device, new equipment designed to quickly identify driver fatigue through monitoring the eyes, nose and mouth area of drivers had been introduced. The device caused the driver chair to vibrate, sounded an alarm and send notification to a control centre if the driver's head dropped or looked in the wrong direction for a length of time.
- viii. Trams Operations Limited was the first tram company in the UK to install the Guardian device. Other public transport providers were now looking at introducing it.
- ix. Aligned with the new equipment, a fatigue management procedure had also been introduced to support drivers to manage any fatigue related issues. Managers and supervisors had been taught how to ask staff questions about fatigue and all staff understood what fatigue was and were able to identify the signs.
- x. Enhanced customer training had been introduced to ensure that staff looked after the wellbeing of customers.

- xi. Following the derailment, there had been engagement with staff at all levels of Trams Operations Limited and a process had been put in place to report back to staff after issues had been raised.
- xii. All the improvements introduced had led to an improved relationship with the Trade Unions. New uniforms had been provided for staff and the mess rooms at the depot and the tram link shop had been refurbished.

Following the presentation the Sub-Committee were given the opportunity to question the attendees, with the first question concerning the reduction of the maximum speed for trams to 70 kilometres per hour (kph) and whether this was still too high. It was advised that trams were only allowed to reach 70kph on open stretches of the track when they could not mix with other traffic or pedestrians. In all other circumstances the limit was 20 kph.

Regarding additional safety precautions introduced on the network, it was confirmed that cats eyes were being fitted in tunnels to help drivers to recognise which direction they were driving. The glass used in the windows of trams was being fitted with extra strength film, with it currently installed in 13 trams and the full roll out due to be completed by the Spring. Progress was also being made on the introduction of a new braking system, which was expected to be installed by the end of 2019.

It was questioned whether there had been many complaints about the driving ability of the tram drivers. It was advised that issues mainly arose from the use of the hazard brake, the effect of which could be jarring for passengers. On average the hazard brake had to be used once or twice a day across the tram network.

Looking forward to the future of the tram network, it was questioned whether there had been any discussion about potentially extending the route to allow greater connectivity across South London. It was confirmed that officials from Transport for London had met with representatives from Croydon Council, but at present the only extension of the route being considered was towards Sutton, with options for this being assessed. Transport for London was looking at different ways to fund extensions to the tram network, which as such did not preclude further extensions in the future. It was noted that bus routes were also being looked at as part of the Mayor of London's Transport Strategy.

In summing up the discussion the Chair highlighted that all the Sub-Committee were tram supporters who would welcome any additional investment. The Chair thanked both Mark Davis and Jackie Townsend for their attendance at the meeting and the information provided to the Sub-Committee.

Information Requests

Information was requested on the time scales for introducing the new braking system on trams travelling on the Croydon network.

Conclusions

Following the discussion of this item, the Sub-Committee reached the following conclusions:

1. The Sub-Committee welcomed the positive report and agreed to send its thanks to the Managing Director of Tram Operations Limited for the detailed content provided in her presentation.
2. The Sub-Committee was reassured by the ongoing work to improve both safety in the network and driver wellbeing.

15/18 Utilities

The Sub-Committee received a report set out on pages 47 to 62 of the agenda, which provided an update from SES Water and a presentation from Thames Water. The updates provided focussed on water resource, managing leaks and managing the effect of adverse weather upon water supply.

In attendance at the meeting for this item were:-

- Alice Keeping, Local Government Liaison- Thames Water
- Danny Leamon, Head of Metering - Thames Water

During the presentation from Thames Water, the following points were noted.

- i. 2018 was the joint hottest summer on record and had required Thames Water to pump and additional 450 million litres of water into the network.
- ii. Although Thames Water usually tried to avoid asking customers to limit their water usage, they had to in 2018 in those areas that were particularly effected by low water levels. There was a drive to encourage customers to provide mobile numbers to enable Thames Water to communicate more effectively during dry periods.
- iii. Predicted demand for water across the area covered by Thames Water was an average of 2,500 million litres a week. This took into account the variance for seasonal demand, with projections modelled on both a short and long term basis.
- iv. The source of 70% of the water used by Thames Water customers came from rivers, with the rest supplied by underground sources and boreholes.
- v. There had been below average rainfall for 8 of the last 13 months. Rain was needed to allow the opportunity to put water back into reservoirs, which were currently 90% full. January and February had been dry, which was not good in terms of preparation for summer and it was hoped that rainfall would be closer to average over the next couple of months to make up for this.
- vi. Croydon was very similar to the rest of London, with 50% of its water supply coming from the River Thames and the rest from underground water sources which were located in Waddon, Russell Hill, West

Wycombe and Addington. Thames Water was continuously undertaking maintenance on its infrastructure to ensure that it was reliable for summer.

- vii. Action being taken by Thames Water to manage demand included the offer of smart meters for homes which was now being extended to businesses. There was enhanced modelling in place for extreme weather events and improved support for vulnerable customers during any such events. Thames Water also worked hard to reduce leakages and ensured that there was resilience in the potentially vulnerable areas of the system.

Following the presentation the Sub-Committee was given the opportunity to question the representatives from Thames Water on their service delivery. The first question related to the roll out of water meters to all residential properties, with it highlighted that correspondence had been received advising residents that it would be happening in the local area, but to date there had not been any evidence of this work taking place. In response it was highlighted that the installation of water meters was a large programme of work with over 400,000 homes covered by Thames Water. From the work undertaken to date, Thames Water had encountered a number of issues such as complications from installing meters in large rental properties. However they had been able to learn from this process to ensure that it would be more efficient going forward.

As residents had already received notification that the move to install water meters would be happening prior to Thames Water being in a position to install meters in the borough, it was suggested that sending the letter to inform residents may have been premature.

It was noted that anecdotally there seemed to be an increasing number of leakages and as such it was questioned how much was spent by Thames Water to fix these leakages. It was advised that Thames Water published information about leakages monthly on their website. It was acknowledged that the level of leakages was higher than it should be, with the target for leakages not met in the past two years. Thames Water had invested £100m above their original budget to address these issues which had resulted in improvements. The level of leakage in Croydon was high, but not adversely dissimilar to where it was expected to be. At present Thames Water was repairing 1,500 leakages a week, compared to 900 per week a couple of years ago.

In answer to a question about the response times for fixing leaks once reported it was advised that there was aimed to fix all visible leaks within 5 days, given the time it took to liaise with the Highway team at the Council to arrange for access to the leak. If a leak effected a customer's supply it would increase the urgency of repair. At present an average of 200 visible leaks were reported on a daily basis, all of which were visited within 24 hours.

As recent summers had been increasingly drier and hotter, it was questioned whether climate change was included as a factor when forecasting future demand. It was advised that Thames Water planned for maximum demand

periods such as during the summer and worked to ensure that there was resilience within the system to meet this through reducing leakages and investing in the infrastructure. Thames Water was also talking with their customers about managing demand to reduce the pressure on the supply during peak periods.

In response to a question about ground water levels, it was advised that the amount of water that could be taken from these sources was regulated by the Environment Agency, with only a certain amount of extraction allowed. Thames Water worked closely with the Environment Agency to plan ahead and mitigate against the times when there was a need to reduce the amount of water that could be extracted through the introduction of new pipe work to transport water or identifying new ground water sources. A concern was raised by the Sub-Committee about the water level of the River Wandle as a result of water extraction.

It was noted that in certain parts of the borough, which were at higher level topographically, residents had raised concern about their water pressure and as such it was questioned how water pressure was monitored. It was advised that pressure management was a key part to managing leakages and as such it was managed continuously for any issues. Thames Water would install boosters to increase the water pressure in tall buildings if required, but it was likely that residents living in areas of higher topography would experience more issues with pressure.

The Chair thanked both representatives from Thames Water for their attendance at the meeting and the information provided to the Sub-Committee.

Information Requests

The Sub-Committee requested the following information from the representatives of Thames Water:-

1. Request the full programme for meter roll out in Croydon over the next five year programme.
2. Request information on any additional infrastructure investment planned for Croydon.
3. Request information on whether there has been any issues in Croydon that may affect water pressure, particularly in the vicinity of Auckland Road and how residents can report issues.

Conclusions

Following the discussion of this item, the Sub-Committee reached the following conclusions:

1. The Sub-Committee agreed to send it's thanks to the representatives from Thames Water for attending the meeting and answering their questions.

2. The Sub-Committee felt that it would have been beneficial to have additional data in the report and agreed that there was a need to be clear on the specific information required when inviting an external organisation to attend a meeting.

16/18 Work Programme

The Sub-Committee received a report, set out on pages 63 to 66 of the agenda on its work programme for the remainder of 2018 – 2019.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Sub-Committee would be held on 19 March 2019 and would be focussed on a review of the Private Housing Sector in the borough. Prior to the meeting a briefing on the topic had been arranged for Members at 6.30pm on 6 March 2019.

The Sub-Committee **resolved** that the Work Programme be noted.

17/18 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This motion was not needed.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm

Signed:

Date:

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